

An aerial photograph of the island of Sark, showing its green fields and rugged coastline, set against a deep blue background.

A Vision for Sark



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A Vision for Sark is a first step towards what is anticipated will be an ongoing systematic and co-ordinated approach to developing policies, allocating resources and reviewing activities. **A Vision for Sark** begins with global aims expressed by islanders then presents several objectives and work streams suggested by the people of Sark to maintain and enhance life on Sark. Once it is agreed as to where Sark wishes to be at a future date, Sark must then agree the basic contents of a plan that will enable it to realise this vision and ensure co-ordination of activities towards achieving common, agreed aims and objectives.

From the Sark survey, the overwhelming requirement is to maintain the principles of a society that has served Sark so well for so many years. **A Vision for Sark** recognises that the world is changing. Society in Sark can no longer rely on everyone abiding by largely unwritten rules and “doing the right thing.” Sark also wishes to demonstrate to the outside world that it is discharging its international obligations effectively whilst ensuring a fair and equitable regime for all its residents.

Sark has always been conscious of the need to weigh all appropriate factors in its decision making and to seek to provide value for money services of which Sark can be proud. This initiative is a further step in the direction of thorough and careful planning in the use of public money. If the Vision is to be achieved, it will be necessary to have a clear process through which projects can be scoped and delivered. Some of the costs may be comparatively large, but would be justifiable if value is realised for the benefit of the residents.



A Vision for Sark is an overarching document which will guide the work carried out in the Committees of the Chief Pleas. Whilst intended to show connections among workstreams and to represent a corporate view of the way forward, nothing can happen without the commitment and energy of the people concerned.

A Vision for Sark reflects the views of the population of Sark, as expressed in a 2012 survey of perceptions in Sark and which forms the basis for this focus. Sark residents described what they like about Sark and made suggestions to help maintain or improve life on Sark. It is clear that the Chief Pleas faces a wide range of demands. Members of the Chief Pleas will strive to achieve reforms and initiatives which satisfy the aspirations of the community and those in business in a harmonious manner. Those working in the public service seek to implement the decisions of Government in an efficient manner.

As a result of these processes, this Vision could be summarised as being:

“To maintain and enhance the well-being and prosperity of a community that upholds the virtues embedded in the Sark way of life while striving to meet international expectations”

Underpinning this Vision is a series of aims which can be developed to achieve more specific objectives. It is believed that these summarise the aspirations of Sark and form the core of what could be achieved. Chief Pleas can now progress along a path to fulfil these objectives and to assess what progress is being made.



Main Areas for Consideration

The last few months have seen major progress in developing **A Vision for Sark** and the setting out of the need to create a series of Committee plans. The move to create an agenda for business planning was prompted by the need to clarify the future direction of government, ensure accountability to the public for its actions and co-ordinate activities towards the attainment of Government objectives.

A further challenge is to devise a structure that better co-ordinates the work undertaken by the Committees. This is important to ensure that all parties are working together towards the shared vision of the future.

The agreed Vision for Sark should be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains valid and to assess what progress is being made. **A Vision for Sark** summarises the present and planned activities intended to achieve those aims and objectives, thereby addressing the concerns and requirements of the people of Sark. All the policies of Chief Pleas should be in keeping with these broad aims and objectives.

Following the recent survey and with supplementary evidence gathered through presentations, discussion and debate, it is now possible to set the broad priorities to support **A Vision for Sark**. Sark faces various challenges, both internal and external, which will affect its ability to deliver its aims and objectives. By having an agreed Vision, focus can be better maintained on delivering agreed policies and not be deflected. The core priorities arising from the questionnaire are to address issues such as:





Maintaining a stable population & a unique way of life

It is clear there is no appetite for any real variation to the current population. This is a major factor when developing policy as it will guide decisions regarding planning, housing, waste management, education, social services and medical care. A need to understand who is living in Sark was an issue related to population control. There is a clear desire to maintain those facets of life on Sark that make it such a special place to live, while ensuring the Chief Pleas can deal effectively with the challenges it faces.

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Land ownership, use & planning

This is an area where residents wish to see change. A complex issue, but security of tenure, clear legal definitions of freehold and leasehold ownership and the ability to borrow to develop lands and properties, within a planning framework that recognises building regulations and consideration for the environment, are aspects of land reform that would be included in this area.

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Managing utility services

Irrespective of whether publicly or privately owned, utility services have been highlighted as an area of concern. International standards regarding the management of waste services are changing, while resilience and cost of other utility services such as water, electricity and telecoms are of vital significance to both private and business users alike. Issues such as the development of environmentally friendly forms of energy are of relevance.

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Developing economic policies & income strategies

The maintenance of a balanced budget is seen to be a prudent policy that is approved of without exception. Concerns have been raised about the prospects for the economy and particularly the opportunities for young people on Sark. The need to be developing new income streams and effective allocation of budgets are related topics in this area.

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Providing healthcare services

While a significant majority of the population appear satisfied with the services provided, concerns were raised with regards to the increasing costs of healthcare, particularly for the elderly.

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Governing Sark

A need for more effective planning of Government services was a concern although no firm opinions emerged from the survey as to how this was to be achieved, other than a need to develop more efficient systems with clear leadership. The view that current divisions are diverting Government's attention from more productive activities was clearly expressed.

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Maintaining a stable population & a unique way of life

Having a clear vision in respect of future population numbers provides a guide to policies in a wide number of areas. These will include:

- Ensuring a suitable housing stock is available that adequately meets the needs of the population;
- Developing a planning regime that ensures that such buildings that are needed, are provided in a manner that is sympathetic to the environment;
- Assessing future needs in respect of utility services such as sewerage, water and electricity;
- Review agricultural policies that encourage self-sufficiency in food production;
- Ensure that the skills and size of the public sector workforce are in keeping with the size of population;
- Consider a regular census programme to provide information regarding the residents of Sark in order to assist with the longer term planning of issues such as the provision of education and health services.



Land ownership, use & planning

This is by far the largest and most complex issue that Sark needs to address, as land use and planning was the matter that was of most concern from the survey of perceptions.

There are many facets to this subject and detailed legal advice will be needed to ensure that it is properly managed, to ensure all issues are dealt with in a manner that is as fair and equitable as possible to all parties.

The subject can be divided into a number of areas, with individual committees taking responsibility for one or more of the tasks. These tasks will include:

- Review and activate land reform legislation currently in existence;
- Assess options to create legally recognised freehold and leasehold properties, with security of tenure;
- Create a land ownership or rental structure that will permit the use of such ownership as a basis to provide collateral for the purpose of securing bank mortgages;
- Establish a planning system that –
 - Sympathizes with the needs of the environment on both land and sea;
 - Supports a balance between traditional land uses and sustainable economic development;
 - Encourages best building practice, especially in commercial premises;
 - Creates regulations regarding the use of chemicals;
 - Encourages waste management techniques that reduce harmful impacts on the land and marine environments;
 - Is transparent and independent.
- Develop a marine spatial plan to regulate developments in territorial waters;
- Regulate environmentally and commercially effective marine energy solutions;
- Review land tariffs to ensure a fair system of charges is enacted that places a greater burden upon those who own higher value properties;
- Share costs and communicate with other islands wherever possible.



Managing utility services

Whether or not utility services are owned or controlled by the public or private sector, the provision and management of utility services are key issues for any government and Sark is no exception. Water, sewerage systems, waste management and electricity are of vital significance to the community, in both business and household sectors.

Furthermore, it is likely that international standards with regards to the land and sea environment will require more sophisticated systems for the treatment of waste and discharges into the sea.

The tasks that face the Chief Pleas in the forthcoming years could include the following:

- Complete a review into the provision and cost of electricity;
- Draft legislation in connection with the use of septic tanks;
- Review discharges into the sea;
- Review options for waste management operations;
- Assess increased costs that may arise from enhanced utility services and devise plans to meet such costs.



Developing economic policies & income strategies

Approximately half of the respondents in the residents' perceptions survey indicated a degree of dissatisfaction with the Government's current economic policies. Less than a quarter were satisfied. The comments ranged across a broad spectrum of issues, including the manner in which people and businesses are taxed, a greater need for planning and co-ordination of economic planning, enhanced co-operation with the business sector and a greater emphasis on the need for jobs, especially for young people.

A recently published Alderney Economic Strategy Plan indicates an almost identical set of conclusions, following a survey of residents, visitors and businesses. 97% of businesses indicated a lack of confidence in economic prospects for the next 4 years.

(See - <http://alderney.gov.gg/article/104799/Future-Economic-Development-Consultation>)

In the light of these comments, the Chief Pleas' future priorities could realistically include:

- Commissioning a report to provide a detailed analysis of the options which have been identified as the basis for enhancing future income generation, e.g. tourism, internet based services, horticultural or agricultural produce or other cottage based industries. There is expert and complimentary advice available in Sark to assist with this task;
- Consulting with the States of Alderney to pool knowledge and thinking in respect of an Economic Development Report;
- Creating a range of incentives to encourage businesses to locate or expand on Sark to provide employment for the indigenous population;
- Considering the introduction of a work permit system to protect the local workforce;
- Reviewing options for taxation of businesses and individuals to provide the resources for future investment in business development and infrastructure;
- Liaising with relevant stakeholders to ensure that planning policies are supportive of economic development;
- Appraise potential for economic partnerships with other Channel Islands;
- Evaluate the value of sport and leisure in the visitor and business economy;
- Invest in training schemes that encourage development of skills that are needed to fill job opportunities, with especial regard for the needs of young people;
- Review options to assess implications arising from the potential emergence of monopoly situations;
- Review the budgetary process to provide the committee with responsibility for budgetary control enhanced powers to oversee financial management issues and set budget targets.



Providing healthcare services

In the recent survey of perceptions of Sark, healthcare was one of the most important issues raised. While there was a general view that standards of medical attention in Sark were excellent, concerns in respect of the increasing costs of medical attention were highlighted in a significant number of responses.

The actions that the Chief Pleas might take in considering how to address these concerns could include the following:

- Reassess the costs of a global healthcare scheme for residents of Sark, provided by a private medical firm;
- Explore the costs of a mandatory insurance scheme, applicable to all qualifying residents;
- Review the basis for a state provided medical scheme, to expand upon the assistance currently provided, with associated proposals for raising necessary funding;
- Provide clear guidelines to those charged with deciding who the Government should be assisting and who it cannot;
- Consider what issues might arise from population trends that indicate longer life expectancy .



Governing Sark

The emergence of the revised Chief Pleas following the 2008 General election was a significant period of change for Sark. This was a huge challenge, with the election of 28 Conseillers from a relatively small population.

This new era has been complicated to a significant degree by the issues arising from the Barclay Brothers and their representatives. *A Vision for Sark*, as envisaged by the comments contained within the questionnaire, includes a resolution of the current impasse, in order that the Chief Pleas can focus its efforts on other matters.

Reviewing the comments made in the survey, a summary of the potential initiatives to provide responses could include:

- Review the Committee system to provide a more streamlined decision making process;
- Increase delegation of tasks to be included in a revised definition of the roles and responsibilities of the Committees;
- Commence a process of dialogue with the Barclay Brothers, to assess what actions are necessary to bring about an end to the current impasse;
- Review the administrative resources required to support the governance of Sark;
- Review the manner in which information is made available to the public, to ensure that principles of openness and transparency are maintained and enhanced wherever possible.



Summary

A Vision for Sark could take many forms, but the decision to prepare an agenda for future activity marks such an initiative as significant. Progress towards the changes that are determined to be of the most important to the electorate will be the subject for further debate, both in the Chief Pleas and in the various committees.

Many residents will have profound concerns about what might be perceived to be unnecessary or unwanted changes to the Sark way of life that has been so loved for so long. However, as a Crown Dependency, there are increasing pressures to conform to international requirements and the UK has to ensure that such conformity is delivered by all its Crown Dependencies when it is challenged by the European Union or similar bodies.

Furthermore, it is clear from the survey and other comments that many residents do have concerns with regard to internal issues and are looking to its elected leaders to satisfy those concerns. Such concerns would be valid whether Sark was an independent country or a Crown Dependency. They reflect a society that is becoming apprehensive with regards to fundamental requirements such as employment, the environment and healthcare.

Adopting this document should serve as an acknowledgement of the awareness of the internal and external pressures that Sark is facing and its determination to respond positively to such challenges. By reviewing options and determining priorities, **A Vision for Sark** can be used as a management tool to determine what areas require attention, to prioritise finite resources to address specific tasks and to offer a means to assess what progress has been made towards achieving stated objectives. A periodic review of **A Vision for Sark** should be undertaken at the end or the commencement of each new Chief Pleas in order that it continues to reflect the current needs of the people of Sark.

It should be noted that there is no proposed timescale for considering the issues set out in this document. Further consultation and debate will be required to agree priorities and to identify resources. However, this process of consultation should not act as a barrier to progress and it will be helpful to demonstrate movement in key areas during the term of the current administration.

Sark will continue to confront change as a result of both internal and external pressures. Adopting a positive approach to the management of change will enhance the opportunity to shape Sark's future direction. By agreeing **A Vision for Sark**, a guide will be available to refer to in assessing progress towards a pre-determined set of objectives.

Summary (continued)

Within Chief Pleas, there will be a need for differing skills to manage the projects that will enable those elements of *A Vision for Sark* that are agreed to be delivered. There will be a need for a strong leadership as well as a united following who are loyal to each other and to Sark.

Enshrined within *A Vision for Sark* is the desire to continue the enhancement of a caring, law-abiding, free enterprise society. A society that allows ample freedom for private enterprise to develop and flourish; a caring society that seeks to ensure its weaker members get the help and support they need. Caring also to ensure that prosperity as it develops is shared, not by means of penal taxation but by reasonable redistributive measures and the provision of good public services. Caring, not just for its people, but for the environment of Sark and its heritage. There is much to be done, but collectively, much can be achieved.

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